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TAGS: PREL PGOV RU UK

SUBJECT: RUSSIA: U.K. U/S RICKETT PROPOSES INCREMENTAL EASING OF TENSIONS

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells: 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) According to an April 25 debrief by the U.K. Embassy, the April 23-24 Moscow visit of U.K. Permanent Under Secretary Peter Rickett was "reasonably positive" in

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beginning the process of reducing tensions in the Russian-U.K. relationship. Rickett's visit built on the exchange of letters between PM Brown and President-elect Medvedev, in which Medvedev welcomed Brown's suggestion that bilateral issues be addressed. In meetings with First Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Denisov and DFM Vladimir Titov, Rickett offered a list of measures that could serve as deliverables for a potential Brown-Medvedev meeting on the margins of the G8 Summit. The measures included relaunching the trade investment steering group, resuming security exchanges (with the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs, not between intelligence services), more regular high-level exchanges (following a two-year hiatus), increased cooperation on rule of law (building on strong legal links between U.K. and Russian lawyers), an easing of visa restrictions, and a resumption of negotiations on a cultural affairs agreement (e.g. the absence of which served as the putative cause of the closure of two British Councils).

¶2. (C) At first, according to the U.K. Embassy, DFM Titov pushed for a complete lifting of the visa restrictions imposed after the summer 2007 tit-for-tat expulsion of diplomats and argued for a resumption of intelligence cooperation, but backed down in the face of Rickett's insistence on incremental steps. Titov accepted the list of possible steps as a basis for discussion, which the U.K. Embassy expects will be addressed in a Lavrov-Miliband bilateral on the margins of the AHLC. The goal of the ministerial meeting will be to confirm the G8 bilateral, approve the list of measures as a starting point, and instruct the bureaucracies to begin work on fleshing out their content. While Denisov was eager to identify points of agreement, the U.K. Embassy stressed that both sides recognized important areas remain unresolved, including the U.K's extradition request for Andrey Lugavoi and Russia's outstanding request for the return of Russian oligarch Boris Berezovskiy. The resumption of intelligence cooperation without progress on Lugavoi or the removal of Patrushev as Chief of Federal Security Service was not under consideration.

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